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## A SECULAR VIEW OF MORAL TRAINING.

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THE hold of dogmatic religion upon the minds of men appears to be growing feebler from day to day, and even Churchmen are found who call in question doctrines that have ever been held to be the essence of religious truth, as the inspiration of the Bible, the personal immortality of the soul, and the personality of the Divine Being. Are we from this to infer that religion itself is dying out? On the contrary, I maintain that its ethical element, its truly vitalizing force, remains intact, to become the starting-point for a new and higher religious development. To this end there is need, in the first place, that religion be grounded on a basis of intellectual truth; on righteousness, in contradistinction to the inverse proceeding which bases righteousness on religion.

It is the ethical element of religion which lends such sublime majesty to the language of the prophets. It is this which gives so sweet and fascinating a power to the loving words of Jesus. It is this which became a mighty lever in Luther's hands, where-with he lifted the Mediæval Church off its foundations. Has this ethical element become less important in the modern age? Is there a less imperative need of developing it? Men follow the pursuits of science and art, as if these could replace the direct study of ethics, the direct tutoring of the will. Men labor for wealth and creature comforts as if ethical considerations did not exist. But does science, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, indeed suffice for the building up of our humanity? Does the cultus of the beautiful satisfy all our spiritual needs? Does the tremendous progress of the industrial arts tend to exalt, or does it not often lower the true standard of manhood among those who are engaged in the race for wealth? Is not righteousness as important as knowledge and beauty? Does not morality, apart from science and

art, apart from mythological religion, require to be cultivated for its own sake and by its own methods? Is there no need of a special ethical culture at the present day?

Look at the disorders and the miseries by which society is afflicted, and answer whether there is any such need or not. Walk up Fifth avenue, in New York, on some fine day, and see the palatial residences with which it is being adorned; residences which recalled to Mr. Spencer the example of the Italian republics, whose liberties perished in consequence of the enervating luxury of the citizens. Look at those residences: palace by the side of palace; and then consider that in a city where so much wealth is stored up, there is not, on the other hand, wealth enough to supply adequate hospital accommodations for the poor and sick; that many of the chronic sick—those who are most deserving of help, those whose condition is most pitiful and painful—are turned away from the doors of hospitals because there is not room for such as they, and are but too often left to die in garrets and cellars. Look at that city, the richest on the continent, whose private citizens have such lavish means to expend upon themselves, and yet it is left without an adequate public library, which much poorer and smaller cities are supplied with. Look at that city into which the whole land pours its treasure, where one citizen will build himself a house large enough to accommodate a dozen families; and on the other hand, down town, in the lower wards, a dozen families will be crowded into a house hardly capable of decently accommodating one. Consider these contrasts; consider the half-million of the population shut up in tenement houses without sufficient light, without pure air, without comfort, without the ordinary decencies that make life desirable, and what a story do these contrasts tell—what a need of moral culture do they reveal!

And is it only of New York that we are forced to complain? Are we to be told that our land is young—compelled to devote its energies to the building up of a great material civilization, and that hence flow the evils which we deplore? Turn, then, your eyes toward Europe, the seat of an ancient and highly developed civilization, and ask yourself how fares the moral culture of men there. Turn your eyes toward Europe, and see a whole continent one vast military camp, each nation expending its best energy and vitality in the endeavor to weaken

and impair the energy and vitality of its neighbors. See the spreading power of anarchists, the misery of the masses, their discontent, their ominous murmurs, their suppressed unrest; and, on the other hand, the stubborn arrogance of the powerful. Look, if you would have one glaring instance of the moral defects of our civilization, at the Jew-baiting that recently occurred in the very heart of Europe, in Germany the Greece of the modern world, in Berlin the Athens of that Greece, and consider of what a low and undeveloped morality, in the midst of art, science, and refinement, the fact that such scenes were possible is the shocking evidence. The civilizing influences of modern times have reached the intellect and the taste; they have by no means affected morality as deeply as is requisite. Indeed, morality has always until now been crowded out of the place of importance which is its due. Its influence, it has been supposed, would flow incidentally from other influences; it has never been singled out to be promoted in an independent manner. Hitherto attention has been chiefly given to the teaching of religious dogmas, and it has been believed that morality would follow, as a matter of course, from faith. To-day, when in the estimation of many, science and art have taken the place of religion, the same mistake is made of taking it for granted that from the pursuit of science and art morality will incidentally follow. But theology and science, even in connection with art, are alike inadequate to build up character and to perfect conduct.

And if you would estimate how much an independent movement is needed to establish clear ideas on the subject of morality, consider the uncertainty that exists in regard to the very fundamental topics of morality even at the present day. Take, for an instance, the institution of the family. How many persons are there who at all adequately realize the moral principle on which the sacredness of the family relation rests? There has been recently published a digest of the marriage and divorce laws of the States. What glaring discrepancies of opinion does this little book reveal. The question within what limits of consanguinity marriage should be permissible is all unsettled. In one State, at least up to 1878, marriage between an uncle and a niece was valid; in another State such marriage is void, and parties entering into it are liable to be punished in the penitentiary. In some States the husband is allowed a privilege of transgression which is not permitted to the wife, and the chief

offense against the marriage relation is differently defined in his case than in hers. In one State divorce is not granted at all, the sacramental idea of marriage prevailing; in another, it can be obtained with comparative facility. In one State imprisonment for life is a ground for divorce; in another State imprisonment for any term longer than a year is deemed sufficient. What evidence of looseness of moral ideas is given in these oscillations of legislation. What testimony to the chaotic notions that prevail have we in the fact that such contradictory laws are enacted within the radius of a few hundred miles; that a marriage which is perfectly valid in one State is punishable by imprisonment in another, and, as may be added, the children who are regarded as legitimate in one State are refused legitimation in another.

In regard to the institution of government, too, the same confusion prevails, as appears in the debate now proceeding concerning the proper limits of the functions of government; in the discussion of such questions as whether the State shall assume the control of railroads and telegraphs; and in how far it may interfere with the rights of corporations. What clashing and contradictory opinions are put forward in connection with these subjects; how little has the conception of the moral functions of human government yet penetrated into the popular consciousness.

And even in regard to the abstract principles of ethics, how little agreement is there, how little clearness. Here is one school of philosophy that says sympathy is the root of morality, and that seeks to found the whole scheme of duties upon mere impulse. There is another school that tells us utility is everything and would have us believe that all morality is nothing better than a refined egotism. There is a third that takes for its fundamental principle the theory of evolution, and asserts that the development of life is the aim of man, and that all conduct is moral which looks to that end. And these philosophers, as a rule, argue in their closets concerning the general theory of ethics, without taking greatly into account, as they ought to do, the special problems of ethics; without rising, as scientists do in every other department, from a detailed consideration of particular cases to a principle of explanation which shall cover those cases.

And thus we are prepared to state the second reason why an

independent movement for ethical culture is necessary, and why ethical societies are needed to incorporate such a movement. It is that we need to give men a clearer understanding of applied ethics, a better insight into the specific duties of life, a finer and more comprehensive scheme of moral practice. The Church is an institution intended to save souls for the hereafter. The ethical society is an institution for perfecting the moral life here. The emphasis laid by the Church on questions touching the hereafter has tended to the neglect of matters essential to the nobler ordering of our earthly life. Conversely, the prominence which must be given to simply moral problems by a society avowedly organized for the purpose of ethical culture, will tend eventually to secure greater attention to these problems and will promote their ultimate solution. The teachers or leaders of an ethical society will naturally address themselves to a discussion of such matters as the ethics of the relations of the sexes, the ethics of service, the ethics of the relations between capital and labor, the ethics of government, the ethics of business, the ethics of sickness, the ethics of bereavement. They will propose to themselves the consideration of the difficult and sometimes agonizing cases in which duties seem to conflict with one another, and will seek a light for themselves, as well as for others, in the obscure passages of inward experience. Thus, being compelled by their position as ethical teachers to ponder unceasingly the special cases into which moral obligation differentiates itself, they will, it is hoped, help in making clear the fundamental principle that covers these cases; they will aid in establishing a veritable science of morality as contradistinguished from the natural and historical sciences; and they will guide their fellow-men to act in their moral perplexities according to principle, instead of as now according to a vague empiricism, the impulse of the moment, or the drift of popular opinion.

But it is not enough that we should know what the right is. Men may know a thousand times over what is demanded of them, and yet lack the resolution to do it. And this leads me to speak of the third reason why an ethical movement and ethical societies are needed. They are needed to supply that stimulus and energy to the will which is so indispensable. This may be accomplished in two ways: First, by the mere fact of association. The mere fact of associating with others for the purposes of

moral reform lifts the individual out of his helplessness and equips him with a power which he would never possess when left to his own devices. The momentum of a mass in motion is greater than that of any atom which composes it, and sweeps each individual atom along with a degree of force which it could never acquire in its isolation. Secondly, the needful stimulus of the will is to be communicated by the contagion of the leader's example. The leader of an ethical society must, like every religious teacher, be earnest in his convictions, deeply imbued with the importance of his work, zealous in the cause of the world's betterment; a disciple of the ancient Isaiah, whose words were firebrands from a burning soul that kindled where they fell. The influence of such personalities cannot yet be spared. The human race is not yet so far advanced that we can dispense with the impulses that come from men of more than average intensity of moral energy.\*

Fourthly. Ethical societies are needed for the sake of the children. It is time that men of advanced opinions should have the courage to teach their children what they themselves believe to be true. It is a great mistake that many parents who have left the churches make when they assert that the example of a pure home-life is sufficient for forming the character of children. There are many problems that oppress the minds of the young as they enter manhood and womanhood, for which they can find no solution in the example of their parents. There are many grave questions for whose settlement the kindly but vague advice of fathers and mothers affords no adequate guidance.

\* There is a higher aspect of association, however, than that which is mentioned in the text. The very nature of an Ethical Religion prescribes the necessity of association. The form of a religion has ever been an attempted copy of its ideal. The Christian Church is an attempted copy of the Communion of Saints, under the lordship of Jesus in Heaven. A society for ethical religion will be an attempted copy of that community of reasonable beings absolutely obedient to the law of reason, which is—the moral ideal! They will attempt to be a community within the community, illustrating a higher righteousness among themselves, adopting laws and modes of social living for which the community at large is not yet ripe. They will thus attempt to build a refuge for the ideal in the midst of surrounding realism; to become forerunners in the present of a better time; to lead men by a pure example in the journey toward the perfect. The members of such a society will never be slack in their efforts for the reform of others, but the principle of complete and radical self-reform in and by association will be their distinctive watchword.

The young require, and should receive, direct moral instruction. They should be led to discuss in detail the specific duties of life, the self-regarding duties, and the duties which man owes to others. Their moral judgment should be sharpened, their sensibility to the finer distinctions of right and wrong should be quickened, and a casuistical treatment of ethics, such as the philosopher Kant has indicated, should be attempted for their benefit. They should be taught the history of religion, at least of the great ethical religions, so that they may learn to distinguish what is worthless from what is valuable in the Bible and other sacred scriptures, and may discriminate between what is temporary and what is lasting in the manifestations of the religious spirit in the past. They should finally be led to construct for themselves, when they are of sufficient age, a philosophy of life, based upon ethical considerations, such as may serve for their guidance, their support, and their solace in later years. All this should be attempted, but it has not as yet been attempted, except here and there in the rarest instances. And, if for no other reason ethical societies were proposed, it were a sufficient reason to form them for the sake of the children, for the sake of building up in them a better and nobler life, for the sake of giving them a fairer start on the road to virtue than their parents often had. I am well aware that there are those who think differently, that there are persons of the most radical convictions who yet send their children to orthodox Sunday-schools, saying, at least they will receive moral influence there. Yet, I would ask, do they receive nothing besides? Do they not also learn the old scheme of dogmas which the modern mind is struggling to shake off, the old cruel notions of a hell, the old pitiful motive of doing good for the sake of future reward or from fear of future punishment? To me it seems that the supreme duty which parents owe to their children is to help them to rise, if possible, higher in the scale of humanity than they themselves have risen. And the unpardonable sin is the sin against the purity and freedom of a child's development.

And lastly, the purpose of an ethical movement is that out of it may spring an ethical belief with regard to the world, a moral optimism, a belief that the universe is making for righteousness, that there is a good tendency in things. Such a belief we need. It is not enough that we wrong no one. and seek to help our fellow-mortals as much as is in our



power. When we look abroad over life, when we see how cruel fate often is; how Nature, in the shape of floods, conflagrations, and disease, strikes into our wisest plans, and wrests from us the most cherished objects of our affection; when we see in society around us vice often exalted to honor and virtue trodden under foot, then we need to rise in spirit above the present pain to a future good, above the present wrong to a future right, above the present incompleteness to a future perfection. Then we need to feel that at the deep central heart of the world there abides an eternal purpose, for whose accomplishment we, by our sufferings, are helping to pay the price. We need to feel that no effort is ever wasted, that no honest reaching out for the good is ever lost, that the great all is pressing forward toward a high, a glorious goal. But, how shall we obtain this conviction that there is a good tendency in things? In the old religion it is based on revelation; but how shall those who cannot accept revelation build it up in themselves? We cannot logically demonstrate it. It is in vain we go to science for help. All science seizes only a fragment of the whole. It can never hope to prove the certainty of the triumph of the good.

There is only one way to obtain this conviction. It is not possible to enter into the nature of the good by standing aloof from it—by merely speculating on it. Act the good, and then you will believe in it. Throw yourself into the stream of the world's good tendency, then you will feel the set of the current that comes from the fountain-head. Become familiar through practice with the nature of goodness, then you will be filled with trust in its excellent and triumphant power. For you cannot be constantly engaged in working the good without becoming assured that the forces of the universe are on your side, that all evil exists only to be bound and subjected and denied; for you cannot stand in the light without feeling the glory of the light; and the conviction that the world is moving toward great ends of progress will come swiftly and surely to those who are themselves engaged in the work of progress.

FELIX ADLER.